

These are times when land issues and concerns and rampant destruction of Goa have reached their nadir, land being beyond the reach of the average ordinary Goan. These are also times when divisive politics is at its peak. The latest being the effort to pit one minority against another. The Waqf Board controversy rages in the country, and efforts are being made by the powers that be to play further divisive politics in Goa by getting the Church on their side.

In such times, one can draw inspiration from the legacies of two persons who made the crossing recently. The one a retired High Court Judge, whose death found many reminiscing about his integrity as a judge and his judgements articulated in simple language, and the other a journalist who was posted in Goa for a while, but who continued his attempt to understand Goa and voice its concerns through even an article written very recently.

It was the year 2009. There was a complaint before the State Police Complaints Authority, about the ham-handed action during a raid of a *madrasa* by then Deputy Superintendent of Police of Mormugao. The Chairperson of the State Police Complaints Authority then was Retired Justice (now late) Eurico da Silva. In times when a little spark is fueled into a big flame, Justice Eurico Silva blazed a different path, in being gentle beneath his firmness and firm beneath his gentleness.

Justice Silva ensured that those who felt offended were allowed to articulate their grievances in what felt like a safe space, and then in his characteristic style secured an apology from the police officer. In the manner in which the proceeding was conducted, the police officer understood that he had crossed the threshold of legitimately expected behaviour, and had hurt the sentiments of the community – and tendered an explicit apology, which was duly accepted by the Complainants. The deterrent effect was palpable in the conduct of the particular Deputy Superintendent of Police ever since.

Deeply moved by this attitude in Justice Silva's quasi-judicial posting, I decided to interview Justice Silva post his demission from the State Police Complaints Authority, and had the opportunity to understand the workings of his judicial mind that found ways to navigate the labyrinth of justice holding people to account in a way that would not only deter them from doing those actions again, and would in fact convert them.

Besides that, given that the survey records are a deviation from the land record maintenance systems that were earlier maintained, it is important to understand the import of its provisions. A judgement that Justice Silva pronounced in his capacity as a judge of the Bombay High Court, in respect of survey records, is an illustration of his lucid accessible language.

Having said that, another person who recently made the crossing and was deeply troubled by the manner in which his own hometown of Tulzapur in Palgarh District of Maharashtra has been destroyed, the patterns of which enabled him to see the oncoming avalanche of destruction in Goa, was Ashley D'Mello. He was posted in Goa as a reporter for the Times of India from 1992 to 1996, and returned several times thereafter, until illness forbade it. His sharp instinct was reflected in his writings. At times when histories are sought to be distorted, his vivid narratives of the histories based on authenticated sources coupled with his interactions with people, are a measure of the kind of journalism that is badly needed today.

As Ashley D'Mello's sister quoted his friend saying, "Ashley was an honourable East Indian and an honorary Goan". In what was the last published article in a Goa 1556 publication '...And Read All Over?', released in Goa an hour before his death at Bombay, Ashley presented his ring side view of the anti-Konkan Railway agitation and the prophetic role of the Church in the agitation, in standing up for justice. The Church needs to continue to support the people proactively in the spirit of standing up for justice, as the railway once again threatens to disrupt the ecology and heritage.

Pertinent to note in the article, is D'Mello's disclosure of his simplistic impressions before coming to Goa of the agitation being one of Goan landlords resisting land acquisition, and his discovery here that the resistance comprised of people from different sections of society, where the Church played an active role in supporting the people. A telling reminder of the need to dispel myths and highlight the specificities of Goa, which, stem from the impact of the varied kind of reigns over Goa, the Portuguese reign being the longest. This is also relevant in the context of Waqf Amendment Bill, 2025, in a state that does not have a Waqf Board, and where yet, the Waqf Amendment Bill has been a subject of discussion of the ruling BJP with, so it is believed, the Archbishop of Goa.

What does this suggest? Does it hold ominous portents for the Church if they don't 'comply'? Does it not hold ominous portents anyway, given the manner in which hoodlums have an open playing field now? Will the Church sit on the fence? It did not when the Congress Government's corruption was bursting at the seams in 2012. It "sent out a strong message asking the faithful to vote against corruption", as D'Mello's article 'Politics in Goa: Role of the Catholic Church' points out, quoting Tomazinho Cardozo. Will it start its work of sending out strong messages now about the need to change the state of things and the constant polarization in the garb of setting things right? Will it ask whether setting things right should not begin with the majority, so that if indeed they want to right some public wrongs, they should be even-handed and not target a particular religion? Will the Church stand up, like Jesus cleansing the Temple, against exploitation and dishonesty that is plaguing Goa? Will the Church stand up against the price gouging happening with land, taking it beyond the reach of

the average Goan? Will the Church stand up against the unfair currency exchange, and the imbalances in international trade, which successive Governments have so far refused to bring within the ambit of discussions in Parliament?

Much to reflect upon in the context of times in Goa today from late Justice Eurico da Silva and late Journalist Ashley D'Mello, about ways of doing, and ways of interrogating!

Share this...

